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ABSTRACT

The contents of this booklet focus on effective techniques for using dramatics in the classroom and are based on the premise that drama can integrate all skills and help to avoid fragmentation in learning. Chapters discuss motivating the dreamers in the classroom, curriculum dramatics--eclectic teaching, training the teacher, transforming the classroom, how the teacher promotes creativity, problems encountered in curriculum dramatics, and some other classroom projects. (JM)

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DRAMATICS IN THE CLASSROOM: MAKING LESSONS COME ALIVE

Fastback 70

By Elizabeth Flory Kelly

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SPARKING THE DREAMERS

(Girl is leafing frantically through a large dictionary.)

Girl: *(reading)* Gorgeous, adjective. Meaning splendid, very fine. . . . Hmm. Splendid? What does that mean?

(She leafs through the dictionary again.)

Girl: *(reading)* Splendid, adjective. Meaning gorgeous, superb. *(pause, thinking)* What does superb mean?

(Again leafing through the dictionary with growing tension.)

Girl: *(reading)* Superb, adjective. Very fine.

(Girl slams dictionary shut with a bang.)

Girl: Where does this get me? *(She stalks off stage.)*

A student who had been drilled in the use of the dictionary vented her feelings by creating that skit. It is an example of the free flow from one art medium to another within a school core subject.

Drama can frequently pull together a unit of study. By limiting a student to one or two properties or just a suggestion of a costume, the student's creativity, ingenuity, and imagination are stretched without splitting concentration. Because drama consists of the study of human relationships, some artists and educators are beginning to realize that it can be used as a method or process of teaching, which, properly focused, not only motivates but also accelerates learning.

How many teachers have experienced frustration in attempting to spark the class dreamer, the child whose mind floats away from

any type of memory work, disciplined thinking, grammar, or accurate mathematical computation?

Listen to a frustrated eighth-grader express herself on the subject:

As the class is sitting in math
And popping numbers across,
A lone little self is sitting
In utter bewilderment.
Have you ever had that feeling
Of not knowing what's going on,
And soon you find yourself
In a web drawn up to your chin?
Feel for this poor little child
Sitting in bewilderment
For this unknowing poor little child
is ME!

As an English teacher with an artistic background, I studied procedures for identifying the creatively gifted and academically gifted. I found my first clue when I learned that frequently the profiles of the two groups showed surprisingly few similarities. Refocusing my teaching objectives to find their "magic buttons" for motivation, my dreamers were relabeled my creative talents.

Creative writing assignments "discovered" many of these talents, but many floaters never found their particular self-worth until they were touched by drama. The oversized girl grouch suddenly became the much-lauded class mime. The happy-go-lucky goof-off suddenly discovered the joy of perfecting when she asked to memorize the lead role in a Saroyan one-act play. The beautifully coordinated gymnast, who seldom contributed in class or completed a homework assignment, was suddenly motivated to memorize the entire *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene for class performance after viewing Zeffirelli's film. Again and again a red-hot debate moved into role playing and multigroup improvisations, sweeping the class into a many-faceted examination of the "why" of an emotion. Such an experience involved passive students and tumbled confirmed outsiders into the center of the educational circle.

Certainly drama techniques must be scrutinized more closely as a valuable contribution to teaching methodology. Although the words theater and drama are frequently used interchangeably, the Greek roots indicate a basic difference. Theater, according

to Webster, comes from Greek meaning "to see, to view." Drama, however, comes from the root meaning "to do or live through." One tremendous teaching asset of drama is that, through its ability to help people identify with other situations and peoples, it becomes a tremendous humanizing force. Ignorance and prejudice often dissolve when the bearer is performing on the other side of the fence or in another's shoes.

The learning experience is increased because drama can isolate a segment of life for study and reflection. True learning occurs in improvisation when moments of reflection drop a mundane skit into a larger universal framework. Recognition of this by Dorothy Heathcote, the great British artist-teacher, has multiplied the use of improvisational techniques as educational tools.

An interesting analogy to her insight was heralded years ago by playwright Thornton Wilder in the third act of *Our Town*. In it Emily, having died in childbirth, asks to relive a day on earth. She is advised against this by the other people in the cemetery, but she insists. She chooses to relive her twelfth birthday, knowing in advance the coming sorrows and separations. She finally bursts into tears and returns to the cemetery, saying, "I can't. I can't go on. Oh, Oh, It goes so fast. We didn't have time to look at one another. I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed . . . Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? . . . every, every, minute?" Teacher-structured learning moments focus on a segment of life, slow it down for reflection, and allow the student to examine it with added awareness of "what it's all about."

Junius Eddy, formerly of the Ford Foundation, wrote in *Upside Curriculum*, "The arts as processes need to be examined carefully for their application to teaching situations . . . with emphasis on affective as well as cognitive goals." In my description of motivated "floaters," the affective drama technique was the learning stimulus. It swept the class into empathic situations that developed into cognitive learning moments. These learning perspectives occurred when the drama was arrested or completed and a reflective discussion searched for symbolic truths or fresh points of view.

"Motivation" is derived from the same Latin root as "emotion," meaning to move. Harold Taylor wrote, "Thinking is an ac-

tivity of the whole organism which begins in the senses . . . and involves the emotions." What our teaching frequently neglects is that emotional motivation must precede, as well as accompany, cognitive learning.

A junior high school English teacher is told her curriculum will consist of teaching "clauses, verbals, and styles of writing." Asking if that is all, she hears, "Isn't that enough? Teaching those things *well* should certainly be sufficient." The key word is "well." What is meant by teaching "well"? It should include motivating students. How do we motivate except by making subject skills relevant to individual students? And what is the relevant area of common experience where a teacher and her "unskilled" students can communicate? This could lie in the area of common humanness. Drama contains a universal human thread integrating all skills and helping to avoid fragmentation of learning that so frequently occurs when skills are taught in isolated compartments.

CURRICULUM DRAMATICS—ECLECTIC TEACHING

Curriculum dramatics is a continually evolving, unabashedly eclectic method of teaching. Any dramatic means that motivates, accelerates, and deepens the quality of learning should be used. Frequently two or three learning objectives can be simultaneously accomplished through dramatic techniques. A class can experience an integrating "group dynamics" session while simultaneously role-playing historical characters and pondering human conflicts involved in the French Revolution. Thus drama techniques, frequently used for a sociological or psychological objective, can be refocused for effective subject-oriented learning. Curriculum dramatics uses drama techniques to deepen and enhance education by using affective skills of participation and empathy. Students gain experience in testing simulated, alternative life choices. The teacher guides students in identifying with and examining selected pressure points of human conflict. Curriculum dramatics frequently acts as the coordinating medium, binding together several educational disciplines and arts.

Artists working in the early days of creative dramatics frequently expressed fears that using drama as a learning tool might make art the workhorse of the curriculum. Certainly many "dramatic" atrocities have been committed by unknowing teachers who were frantically slapping together holiday programs or Health Day skits! Such practices can be eliminated when teachers learn the basic principles of the art so they will not warp the medium to fit nondramatic materials. Ideally, university and college methodology courses should train their teachers so that they

could automatically slip in and out of various art techniques, each appropriate for capturing the learning interest of an individual student.

What Can Curriculum Dramatics Do?

Drama can frequently be a catalyst, pulling together a unit of study.

Another example of freewheeling from one medium into another to support a learning concept occurred with a group of third-grade boys who had been studying transportation. These young transportation enthusiasts depicted a train struggling up a mountainside using their rhythmic bodies and sound effects. The emotional exuberance of the invention of the wheel was expressed with whirling, colored streamers. The advent of air flight was celebrated, a class of Jonathan Livingston Seagulls crowning their performance with a barrage of handmade paper airplanes soaring into the audience. The teacher even helped the boys implement a tremendous scarf dance under the guise of The First Balloon Ascension. Nylon scarves were fastened together and ballooned upward in rhythm to Strauss' *Music of the Spheres*. Color, movement, rhythm, music, poetry, science, history, and English were all introduced with a theme song: "Around the world at Hawken School by land, by air, by sea." The drama had been the motivating catalyst: Through people's desire to move faster, they had struggled against the forces of nature, the pull of gravity, fear, and inertia until finding glorious release. The classroom teacher needed no special expertise except the most elementary awareness of media and their possibilities.

This is the era of multimedia as well as the arts. Assess your own abilities. If you can handle tape recorders, slides, movies, and projectors, incorporate them occasionally in your dramatic productions. Effective learning is frequently multisensory.

Teachers unsophisticated in dramatic techniques may unwittingly choose such an exercise as an integral contribution to their curricula only to realize later that the normal progression of learning has been arrested and no deepening experiences or insights have occurred. On the other hand, if a teacher learns how to adapt such exercises for the greatest effectiveness in the cur-

riculum with a specific class on a certain day, an exercise that might threaten to become a debilitating crutch can be an exhilarating part of quality learning.

The Airport Exercise

Let me illustrate with a recent, specific instance: Victor Miller, from the American Shakespeare Festival Center for Theater Techniques in Education, conducted a very effective teacher drama workshop.

One of Mr. Miller's opening exercises, used to illustrate the components of drama, was a little gem called "Airport." An obstacle course of chairs and boxes was assembled on stage to resemble a littered runway. One teacher volunteered to be the airplane. A scarf tied over his eyes helped him simulate the conditions of a blind landing. A second teacher volunteered to act as the control tower. He was to guide the "plane" to a safe landing without it touching any of the obstacles along the runway. The exercise was filled with dramatic suspense because it established an objective that could be attained only by surmounting a series of challenges. It also established an unusual relationship of trust between the two actors.

A few days later, I was invited to do two half-hour curriculum drama sessions with a "problem" third grade. Consultation with the classroom teacher revealed a class consisting of three children in psychoanalysis, several emotionally disturbed remedial readers, an academically run-of-the-mill middle group, and a smattering of precocious students. Learning was impeded because of poor group socialization. My drama educational objective, learning to work together, was administratively agreed upon.

I decided NOT to begin my sessions with a primary emphasis on people because those relationships were too central to the class problem. The first half-hour session was, thus, spent on preliminary, individual enactments of animals coping with obstacles of nature such as thunderstorms. The children were then asked to return to the circle and vote for their favorite animal. (Of course, horses were agreed upon!) Asked if they would like to enact a story about horses, they enthusiastically agreed. The students were asked to count off by fives, which caused momentary consternation when they realized that friendship cliques that

had been seated together were fragmented when those with identical numbers were asked to act together as a team. The emotional upset was quickly subdued by introducing a preliminary story structure. The groups were asked to enact the purchase of very special horses to be trained to make a trip up the Magic Mountain.

On the second day, the Airport exercise was adapted to the third grade for socializing purposes. The airport runway became a tunnel leading up Magic Mountain. The control tower became the horse trainer, who stood outside the tunnel and verbally led his string of horses through the obstacle course. Eyes of the horses were not masked because such a request would have only been a challenge to peek! Eyes were to be closed because the tunnel was dark. Any horse who peeked was immediately disqualified by his classmates, who were watching tensely just outside the crooked "tunnel" of chairs. Each team consisted of a trainer and a team of horses. Each "horse," crawling on hands and knees while clutching the ankles of the horse preceding him, had to move with the team as a coordinated unit at the command of the student horse trainer. The dramatic tension was superb. But better still, a heterogeneous group of third-graders was learning to work together with a unified focus.

TRAINING THE TEACHER

To use drama as a facilitator of quality education the main thrust should probably not be in developing and publishing drama exercises, but in training teachers to recognize and develop dramatic elements within their own curricula. In these days of "turned off" students, a teacher must develop material stemming from where the students are in their specific curricula. Therefore, textbook exercises, unless handled with great flexibility, tend to make instruction rigid by inserting what may be a non sequitur at the very moment a teacher is trying to relate more closely to the class. Such exercises can sometimes stimulate the creativity of a tired teacher but should never be substituted for creative judgment and proper adaptation.

A carefully sequenced approach of imparting to dramatically unsophisticated teachers some expertise in educationally oriented drama is most needed. Because a teacher is not always working with preplotted stories, she must learn how to identify and to structure a dramatic situation out of a general idea while the students retain a satisfying feeling that they have created it themselves.

It has been suggested that the test for quality reasoning is very similar to the criteria for quality curriculum dramatics. Through perception (or seeing the world through one's senses) and awareness (an inner feeling or consciousness), one can draw conclusions (or find the reflective learning moment). With this order in mind, we begin using curriculum dramatics by developing a belief through the senses, then moving into the study and use of emotional drives and their inherent conflicts.

Often teachers follow given curricula so slavishly that they complain they have no time for "frill" dramatics. Of course, little time exists to memorize extraneous material or even to improvise, when working in educationally meaningless areas. But is not education a process of skill training to better cope with the myriad problems of life? If this is so, how better can a student learn to cope than by projecting self through drama techniques into simulated life interrelationships?

To Start, Find A Kernel

The simplest way to begin is to choose stories, plays, or poems that already contain a dramatic kernel. The secret is not to maintain the original story line but to refocus emphasis to bring out educational objectives. To clarify this technique, let me give a few examples:

The specific **material** taught to a high school class was George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

The educational drama objective was to find the human universals within this high comedy to interest an integrated high school class.

The drama medium was used because the class was very inexperienced in any form of improvisation. A single 40-minute demonstration could move no farther than a class discussion and sit-down character dialogue. But let us consider the educational extensions.

The inherent problem within the play is the process of upward movement of people from one social class to another. What are some of the "superficial" indications of class? (voice, vocal and written grammar, clothes, behavior) This idea can be explored in many ways, such as job interviews between an employer and would-be employee. When a skit ended, the class discussed and voted on whether or not they thought the applicant should have gotten the job. Gradually more subtle observations would be made of body language, moods, and atmospheres to be read and coped with by the applicant. What makes a person a winner? How can one protest effectively? Narrow each area to an example specifically applicable to the lives of teen-agers. For example, how could a student actually change the school's dress

laws? Who should be approached? Which member of the class might be most successful at this and why? When should this person approach the administrator (first thing in the morning, after coffee), and how?

Now the class is ready to go back to *Pygmalion* and see how Eliza Doolittle could play the role of the flower girl who turned into a fine lady. Compare Shaw's ending to that in *My Fair Lady*. Does one seem to ring truer than the other? What is Shaw's objective with his ending? This only begins a curriculum dramatics exploration, of course. But retrace this preliminary outline for oral English and improvisational moments, and you will quickly see the number of in-depth learning moments.

So we began with an informal discussion of the seemingly insensitive crassness of Higgins who had been reared by what appeared to be a very wise and sensitive mother. What had caused Higgins to develop this crass exterior? Students at their seats began improvised dialogue between young Higgins and his first date! The class was involved in an educationally humanizing experience, teaching them the process of studying motivations and of better understanding abrasive people and situations.

Here are two other examples that developed from literature:

The material stemmed from Conrad Richter's *Light in the Forest*, used for seventh-grade ungraded reading.

The educational drama objective was to use oral English as a group review and culminating experience to increase racial understandings.

The drama medium used was an informal debate.

The inherent problem within the story concerned the effects of rearing a child in two different cultures. The debate centered on placing responsibility for the tragedy of this youth "without a country." One side represented the Indians, the other the white settlers. A definite structure had to be maintained for such an informal debate. Time was allotted for each speaker, and scores were kept by a neutral judge as each fresh argument was presented. Notes could be passed to coming speakers by teammates, but absolutely no talking was allowed, except by the designated speaker. When the issue chosen for debate is sufficiently stimulating, the process encourages attentive listening, as well as thinking on one's feet.

The material in the second example was based on C.D.B. Bryan's "So Much Unfairness of Things" from a paperback collection *Twenty-One Great Stories*.

The educational drama objective: A value study of the cause and handling of cheating.

The drama medium began with a student-centered discussion, with the teacher invited to participate like any other student. It then moved into an improvisational examination of alternative choices of action. Then an obligatory scene was enacted by volunteers using alternative solutions.

The inherent dramatic problem emerged as the scene that had not been written in the original story. (Watch for these teaching extensions, as they leave freedom to improvise alternatives.) The students wanted to figure out what had caused the father to change his attitude toward his son, so they improvised the unwritten scene between the ambitious father and the headmaster, after the son had been caught cheating on an exam and was about to be expelled from school.

Human Elements of Math and Science

In case the reader is silently mumbling that curriculum dramatics can be used only for English or social studies topics, let me hasten to insist that it can be used whenever a human element can be used. In science, a third-grade class was learning about the beginnings of the world. Abstract music was played on the phonograph, an open space became available, and the children were invited to explore the feeling of moving in space with their bodies. Rhythms of the oceans were introduced, and finally animals emerged from the sea. Pantomime explored a variety of dinosaur, including the much-beloved miniature horse, the eohippus, as well as horrendous, now-unknown beasties, which stretched their kinesthetic imaginations. Then drama was introduced with the struggle to survive. Four-legged animals became two-legged monkeys and gorillas. Children studied the difference in mobility between paws of dogs and cats, acting out differences with their bodies, the cats mischievously turning doorknobs! Then they were asked the difference between their own hands and the paw of a kitten. After they had investigated the power

given to humans by the simple ability to grasp, they decided they wanted to make a "Dance of Evolution," which put everything into a learning sequence with music to heighten the emotional effect. Someone had also observed that humans not only had command of the environment because of their hands, but they were also the only animal who could laugh. You can imagine how that dance ended!

A rewarding episode came to the teacher a few weeks later when the class went to the Natural History Museum to extend their studies of evolution. The professional science guide said at the end of the day that she had never seen visiting students who could better anticipate progressive evolutionary steps. Curriculum dramatics had left its educational impact!

I handed a geometry teacher a copy of *Flatland* by A. E. Abbott. The story explores an imaginary, two-dimensional, geometric world. What a wonderful learning concept to explore imaginatively: living in a two- rather than three-dimensional world! The teacher took the basic idea of the story and developed her own original plot: Two scalene triangles, at the bottom of the geometric social ladder, which is based on the number of angles one has, find congruent bliss when married by the high priest circle (who spends most of his time contemplating his center). When the two scalene triangles unite for a kiss, they discover they have become a four-sided parallelogram. They have thus upset the whole immobilized social structure of their world! The play is enriched with lyrics bubbling with geometric terminology.

By humanizing and converting abstract concepts into a fresh, two-dimensional world, this teacher challenged her students with many new learning experiences. In addition, memorizing this eighteen-minute playlet had sorted out and tucked away geometric terminology and concepts in the students' memory banks.

TRANSFORMING THE CLASSROOM

How can a normal classroom lend itself quickly to dramatic effects? A teacher might begin by examining sources of light. An inexpensive dimmer attached to normal classroom lights can change a glaring study hall into a mysterious cave. Blackout curtains at the window not only will improve slide, film, and transparency projections, but also will help establish dramatic mood. Movable chairs, desks, and tables that can be pushed aside for unencumbered floor space are a modern must, but I have seen dramatic magic transform a classroom containing screwed-down desks. Elementary sensory exercises began at the desks, went into the aisles between desks, and ended with a few sparkling children volunteering to perform in front of the class. Teachers must learn to make the most of the space allotted. They must learn how much noise will be tolerated by the rest of the school, let alone by their own nerves!

A teacher who wants to expand classroom dreams can purchase several colored spotlights with clip holders to fasten onto a window shade or stepladder. Acting areas can be established on the floor with chalk, masking tape, or carpet remnants. Stackable blocks or platforms can add fresh dramatic dimensions, but when the ingenuity of students has been sparked, even a chalkboard eraser can be delightfully transformed into a cradle telephone! The secret is to make use of what is available and to stimulate the child's own creativity so the teacher can step back and allow

the class to take over. Too often teachers become carried away by their own inventiveness.

Dorothy Heathcote mentions six elements of drama—sound and silence, light and darkness, movement and stillness. I believe that drama includes two more elements: time and space, which can both be condensed or expanded with dramatic effect.

HOW THE TEACHER PROMOTES CREATIVITY

The key to curriculum dramatics is that the teacher guides creativity into quality areas of learning rather than being satisfied with peripheral or pre-prescribed exercises not adapted to a particular moment in a particular class or an individual presentation of a subject. The teacher not only must know the subject matter, but also must remain open to suggestions from students. Too often a creative teacher will impose creativity on a class, thus smothering any creative attempts by students. The real trick in teaching any sort of creative art is to be able to sense how much direction to give a class to guide and stimulate them. The teacher must then exercise the discipline to withdraw from creative activity except to help the class build, when necessary, excitement and tension. This is why the teacher frequently steps into the role of antihero, to give the class something to play against.

The most important techniques are the teacher's tuning quickly into the mood and interest of the class, the ability to find dramatic moments within the curriculum, and structuring those moments to show students the framework within which they can feel free to create. That creativity is not dependent upon complete freedom is one of the first concepts a class must learn in any creative endeavor. All art contains inherent structure, but a beginner frequently needs guidance in finding the correct form. Often the teacher will ask students for the theme, then furnish the specific dramatic situation that will cause the drama to work.

Curriculum Dramatics and "The Odyssey"

The situation or form of the drama will often be indicated by the curriculum itself. An example of this type is a jelled or structured improvisation stemming from a study of *The Odyssey*. As the teacher, I was searching for a culminating experience that not only would indelibly imprint the story in the students' minds but also would unfold new levels of understanding.

I wanted quality learning to continue while moving into drama. I suggested creating a class odyssey. The students had previously researched the word "odyssey," discovering it meant a trip entailing a search. They decided their class odyssey had been a journey throughout the school year in search of the next grade!

The class had recently been introduced to symbolism through poetry. Now they were asked to study each episode of Homer's *Odyssey*, condense the action into a short paragraph, and decide what each adventure represented or symbolized. For instance, the Cyclops were described as very self-centered, antisocial monsters who could not cooperate sufficiently to form a community. The class decided that the one eye of the Cyclops symbolized a force with an introverted, all-demanding focus.

The next assignment was to decide what in the students' own lives might have a similar, all-consuming focus. Their unanimous vote went to television. With this in mind they began creating improvisations centered on TV's ability to divert and draw them from the studies necessary for promotion to the next grade.

The lures of Scylla and Charybdis were symbolized by the distracting pitfalls and enticements of the popular shopping center and teen-age hangout. In this way, each episode's action was condensed and studied for its symbolic essence. This essence was then transposed through freewheeling improvisations into its modern school counterpart. The class repeatedly regrouped while tackling each new episode as they slowly developed a class odyssey. The overall, basic structure of the drama had been furnished by their curriculum. The learning had been enriched by carefully examining the symbolic level of each episode. This symbolic level was then transposed into modern situations related to the students' lives. It has now been nearly ten years since that learning experience in drama took place. Students who have since graduated from college have said that they will never forget this

experience with *The Odyssey*, when they were encouraged to use their individual expertise in acting, mime, song, and dance to give a modern interpretation of their personal class search.

Different Interpretations

Several groups within the same class may be creating from the same theme with observations, reflection, and further thinking occurring after each group's class presentation. This is where a teacher's expertise emerges in the way the class is guided and stimulated to further in-depth thinking. Repetition of the same situation with different interpretations as new insights are discovered can be an extremely exhilarating learning experience.

I have seen a class of third-grade boys thus improvise the planning scene between the Egyptian pharaoh Khufu and his architect Imhotep as they discuss plans for building the Great Pyramid of Giza, constructed long before invention of the wheel. One pair of boys after another volunteered to discuss the pharaoh's dream and together figure out how such a structure could be built: Transporting stone across the river, dragging it on sledges across the desert, building an earthen ramp or hill alongside the structure for hauling up the stone, even deciding what time of year to allow the slaves to return home to plant and harvest crops so that the men and their families would not starve while the tomb was being constructed. Each step of the process was discussed and reasoned out. A sequenced pattern slowly emerged, the enthusiasm of the boys mounting as new methods and problems were explored and another set of boys volunteered to re-enact the Egyptian planning session.

A similar investigation and compounding of ideas along a more imaginative theme occurred with fourth-graders studying Greek mythological ideas about the formation of the universe. Wonderfully fanciful ideas developed to explain how the planets were the offshoot of a game of marbles played by the gods on Mount Olympus, or eggs hatched by Jupiter's celestial hen, or grains of sand flicked from between the toes of Mercury. Scenes were enacted and painted. Similarities and comparisons were made with many of the stories of creation: Hindu, Buddhist, Greek, Old Testament, and modern scientific theories. All lent themselves to short improvisations and writing.

Teachers hope to educate their students for life. Students are learning to live, not just to survive. The subject matter consists of teaching skills, methods, and values for understanding and handling life. The only difference is that the teacher sees the subject at a slightly different angle from the student. To get the proper three-dimensional view for successful learning, teacher and student must function together with a proper communication. Sometimes this communication is enhanced by multimedia dramatic presentations.

"Silence"

A uniquely successful project stemmed from the desire of a rambunctious junior high school English class to do a program on silence. They wrote free verse and brought in slides and pictures for the opaque projector to illustrate them. They invited their families to the program in the school auditorium. It began in semidarkness after a call to silence! They had me time with a stopwatch how long they thought the audience could comfortably remain quiet. Then followed a series of poems exploring many aspects of silence, leading to the realization that the existence of silence was tied into the existence of sound. Choral speaking, a single lonely voice, answering and repetitive choirs were all investigated. These were interspersed with pantomime and jelled improvisations, which had been reworked many times to perfect them to the satisfaction of the class. The English teacher had only to help students to allow all the ideas to surface democratically and to guide their creativity into an artistically gratifying form. They brought their Brownie cameras and wrote furiously! Let me quote a few of their poems. The first is from a transfer student, floating, inattentive to the outside world, immersed in academic problems:

Silence has no shape, no size, no color.
With your eyes closed vacuum-tight
You might reach out . . .
There it would be.

Each has a different feeling for silence
That will never change
Because that feeling lies silent
Deep within each soul.

Another from a brilliant, sensitive child who had suffered great sadness:

Rows and rows—
Sweet and silvery clear—
The very tender innermost
Of the world's tough shells.
But what do you expect of us?
    Crisp thoughts lie untouched,
    Wilting on a bed of white linen
    Yet no one sees.
Ah, it is not what you suppose—
That is not the thing, not the bottom, not the SOUL—
That is some perverted reflection.
It is thwarted desire, a heart wrong side out.
    So and So
    This way and that way
    One or the other . . .
But what do you expect?

And this delightfully actable vignette:

No silence on the bus today.
Rumbling, jam-packed, squeezed with human bodies—
Machines trying to escape the havoc of the office
To the havoc of the home
Through the havoc of a bus.
People talked but no one listened . . . too hard to hear.
With aching feet, jostled, jolted, jerked, jumbled, jarred.
    The bus loped, swayed, halted.
    Bodies shoved off.
    Others shoved on.
    It rumbled slowly, burbling down the street
    With me wishing for silence.
    Listen once more to the people . . . grumble and babble.
    Is not that silence, too?

And out of a moment's pause came this teen-age observation:

Silence is love between two people.
Love so strong that no one can
Break the bond between them,
Love so strong, that they have thoughts
Only for each other,
And nothing will ruin that love.

The sixty students ended their program in darkness, all holding pencil flashlights that illuminated their individual faces:

We have found a suitable place for the night.
Hugging the heated canyon
Near a roaring rapid;
The sun down, the sky black,
Only the low, bright stars;
All that can be heard
Are the lizards
And the cool canyon water
Restlessly flowing.
Is this the end?
Or is there more?
Will day come again
Bringing with it
Exciting new hope and ideas?

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN CURRICULUM DRAMATICS

A fear of many teachers involved in improvisational activities is that the medium can unlatch emotions that might get out of hand. Indeed, the whole efficacy of emotion memory exercises, introduced by Constantin Stanislavsky at the beginning of the century, has since undergone grave scrutiny. Occasionally even a professional actor has been so swept by an emotion that despite training in switching quickly from one mood to another, he has been left deeply shaken. I have seen a class of children so infuriated by an exercise about a high-pressured assembly line that they turned in genuine fury on their student teachers who were playing all too realistically the roles of their hard-headed employers.

A teacher must carefully establish with the class that stepping into a character is simply role playing. The children should be carefully kept in touch with what is reality and what is make-believe. This can easily be established if the teacher occasionally stops the action and slips back into a teacher role to read their mood and feelings: "Do you early pioneers want my British Governor to lay on the taxes? Will that help build your anger?" Such a teacher will thus quickly sense how far the class feels secure within an emotion. Children themselves will usually indicate how far they should safely go with an emotional experience.

Gavin Bolton, the brilliant British drama-in-education analyst, believes, "When drama operates at its best, thinking and feeling must be compatible with the symbolic meanings of the context." He points out that there are several kinds of responses to an emo-

tional situation: an immediate reaction and a symbolic response when the emotion is moved to a more universal level. In identifying and objectifying an emotion a teacher's expertise is most needed. Such a teacher might ask the class, "I wonder if all explorers feel this double pull of excitement about the future and the homesick pull to stay with the past?"

Teachers must be able to take correct readings of their students' emotional as well as intellectual readiness. They must know when and how to combine the affective and cognitive in their teaching. Remembering that inherent dramatic moments frequently lie near the solar plexus, a teacher must anticipate those pressure points not only within the curriculum, but also within a specific class. A teacher who relates quickly to a group will have antennae tuned for reception, rather than immediately broadcasting a curriculum that may not relate to the group. The teacher enters alertly in limbo, absorbing what Stanislavsky calls the actor's "offstage beat," before stepping into a teaching role.

If a high school class has had little experience in spontaneous performance, it may feel very threatened if asked to go into improvisations immediately. Discussions, debates, and reasoning conducted from desks arranged in a circle enabling everyone to be seen are the easiest type of introduction to curriculum dramatics.

But curriculum dramatics cannot be properly understood until we rethink the key objectives of education. Should the basic emphasis be placed on learning skills or how to cope with the myriad human relationships and situations of life? How many of our teacher training courses clearly indicate the multiple, simultaneous levels of instruction, with the proper priority given to each? Many educators now realize the importance of humanizing curriculum by using some affective techniques to gain a better balance of focus with cognitive skills.

SOME OTHER CLASSROOM PROJECTS

To further clarify the use of curriculum dramatics, let me briefly describe several other classroom projects:

The fairy tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" formed the framework for a unit on style, which is frequently a difficult concept to teach. But high school students quickly grasped the idea when they were asked to dramatize this simple plot as Sherlock Holmes might enact it, as a TV commercial, melodrama, slapstick comedy, high comedy, or western.

This plot was also used as an interesting study in characterization. Characters in the cast had to choose a symbolic shape or color that would influence their moods and movements: triangle, square, or circle, and black, green, purple, or red. The emotional feel of color was explored and described with another sense, such as sound. Beautiful, creative writing springs from sensory exercises. A quick way to loosen up the bodies of a young class is to take them on a sensory walk around the room, walking through rice paddies, thirsty and tired on a desert, tiptoeing into a bedroom to avoid awakening the baby, and so on. All improvisation begins with belief, concentration, and focus. Drama begins to emerge when an obstacle or conflict is introduced.

A class might study characterization while simultaneously studying parts of speech in a grammar class:

Character	**Part of Speech**	**Specific Example**
(Written on board by teacher)	(Filled in by student)	(Examples contributed by students)

The name of the character	proper noun	Mr. Power
Sex	noun	male
Name substitute	pronoun	he
His life drive or action	action verb	to grab
How character acts	adverb	ruthlessly
Character description	adjective	selfish, rude
Descriptive words joined together by?	conjunction	and
Location	preposition	in, on, from
His favorite exclamation	expletive	Zounds!

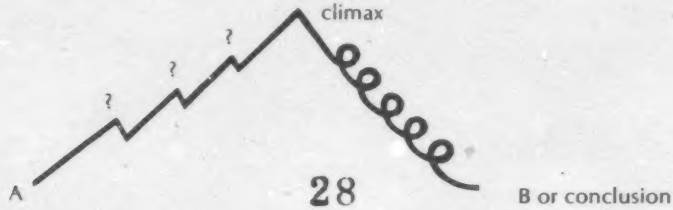
Thus, two characters can be constructed with opposing drives or actions. The class has then already settled three basic improvisational questions:

Who you are
Where you are
What you are doing

Pitting the two characters against each other in a scene will automatically cause conflict or drama. (Remember the four types of conflict: man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. society, man vs. nature.) The ensuing suspense about the scene's outcome can be expressed by a question mark. Combining grammar lessons with rudimentary drama training can be enacted with different resolutions and endings.

Many trips lend themselves to drama when one realizes that a dramatic plot is not expressed graphically as the shortest distance between two points:

A plot can better be expressed by a rising zig-zag line, illustrating an action drive from point A to point B which is interrupted by obstacles and conflicts, thus building suspense:



On the top riser sits the climax. The quick, downward path to the conclusion might be visualized as a spiral that wraps up all the loose threads of plot as it drops to point B and the end.

Keeping a few of these drama fundamentals in mind, a teacher can find dramatic elements in much of the curriculum whenever she desires to use them.

An example of using a journey plot line for improvisational and writing exercises occurred after some middle school students had read Sheila Burnford's *The Incredible Journey*. From a story of animals, it was transposed into a tale of children traveling through the dangers of a city. Even a lesson in map reading was introduced!

Values

Curriculum dramatics has proved to be an invaluable tool for teaching values, where alternative choices can be tried and their results and implications studied. Education to mitigate the trauma of future shock is natural material for improvisational work, which can be sparked by questions introduced by "What if . . .?" "What if energy shortages continue to worsen?" "What if the Atlantic Ocean is replaced by fertile land?" "What if the French Revolution had been fought with modern technology?" Change the time or place, or alter a point of view, and fresh dimensions emerge.

Hunt for universal threads running through time and cultures. I suddenly recognized one as we studied Robert Frost's "Mending Wall." The students and I began to search for all the walls we build between ourselves. One call for ideas produced all the following suggestions, which became springboards for improvisations:

The Berlin Wall . . . Students based this improvisation on a poignant story written by Priscilla Goldthwait, "Night of the Wall," which tells of the separation of a Berlin family who awakened one morning to find they had been divided when the Berlin Wall was erected without warning during the night.

The Chinese Wall . . . A study of the reason for, and result of, a nation isolating itself completely from the rest of the world.

Shakespeare's wall . . . Depicted in the amusing Pyramus and Thisbe scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The Dykes of Holland

Animal and Bird Cages

Walls of Communication . . . An amusing improvisation based on the misunderstandings that can arise when one's vocabulary is limited. (The students were heavily involved with vocabulary building!)

Walls of Superstition

Wall Street

Walls of Deafness . . . A sensitive scene between a normal child and a deaf-mute who were trying to communicate with each other. It was a wonderful study in surmounting sensory barriers.

Mirror Walls . . . The students developed their own fascinating dance, which seemed to reflect their psychological ego walls.

The Walls of Jericho . . . Developed into an exuberant march with the whole class collapsing at the end like a deck of cards!

The choral speaking thread of Frost's poem was interwoven between scenes, acting as a culminating coda. A theme song can often serve the same purpose.

No classroom teacher can expect to have all the art expertise necessary to direct a professional production along these lines. The trick is to size up talents inherent in the students. Let the expertise emerge from them. The teacher is a catalyst, the sparker, the molder of form and theme, who encourages students to experiment unabashedly with their abilities to incorporate a free-wheeling use of the arts.

If a classroom teacher is lucky enough to have interested and cooperative art and music specialists in the building, she might attempt a coordinated arts experience such as one initiated in a junior high English class.

The junior high art teacher was introducing her students to the symbolic surrealist art of Miro. The English teacher wanted to introduce free verse writing as well as principles of dramatic interrelationships. They decided to coordinate instruction. A specific picture containing several elementary figures of stars of varying sizes, a quarter moon, and a TV antenna placed against a somber sky was agreed upon.

The English teacher asked the class to verbalize the overall mood of the picture. The celestial loneliness was described with a series of adjectives. The students were asked to pinpoint this

mood individually in written phrases that were shared with the rest of the class.

The teacher then guided students in studying the figures within this celestial mood, asking them to meditate individually on a specific figure, trying to find its inner action or drive. This was to be expressed by an action verb beginning with "I want. . . ." Teams were formed, each student representing a specific, abstract figure within the painting. Students took their visual positions within the composition and tried to feel their relationships to each other. They began to pantomime these interrelationships.

Meanwhile the art teacher, keeping closely informed of the developments within the English class, had begun introducing puppetry to the same students in art by making stick dolls representing the Miro figures. Students began to realize that inner actions of the figures could not be fully realized by immobilized cardboard cutouts. Coils, joints, and twinkling were introduced while preserving the proper mood and inner context.

Students were then asked to introduce dialogue between the heavenly spheres. They wrote lists of connotative words and phrases expressing the lonely desires of these figures. It became an exciting freeing-up exercise in which all types of sound effects were written and tested orally. Although the word "poetry" was never mentioned until much later, free verse dialogue was now emerging.

The music teacher became intrigued with the literary and visual efforts of his students. He helped them compose appropriate songs and sound effects to accompany the verse dialogue. Sounds such as whisks used on metal wastebaskets, Kleenex over combs, and erasers laid on piano strings were investigated and taped!

For the assembly performance a puppet booth was improvised on stage. The puppeteers could comfortably kneel on mats while manipulating the puppets. The program began with a slide lecture by the art teacher on Miro, ending with the students' chosen picture. The screen was then slowly raised, revealing puppets in positions identical to figures in the picture. Lonely musical sounds began, and the figures moved to the haunting recitation of the verse-dialogue. An aesthetic, educational experience had thus been successfully completed.

A Concluding Episode

Humanizing learning and relating it to where the class is has been particularly effective with inner-city children. I was asked to evaluate a student teacher's use of creative dramatics with a group of deprived second-graders. The teacher was desperately trying to hold their attention long enough to tell the story and cast the characters of "Cinderella." The children did not understand and were not interested in kings and queens. Pandemonium had set in, heightened by several sets of hands banging on the piano. Suddenly the teacher grabbed a spray of lily of the valley she had tucked in her buttonhole that morning. "Look, children," she cried. "See what I found in my garden." Instantly she had the attention of most of the class. "What is YOUR favorite flower?" she continued. She heard a shouted bevy of answers. "How would you each like to be your favorite flower growing from a tiny, little seed? Let's see how tiny you can make yourselves." The focus of the class was still being shattered by a pair of hands pounding on the piano. "Softly, Sheila! Softly! Your noise is making the plants wither." Several children promptly faded to the floor. "We must have soft, growing music . . . THAT'S it! See? You're making them grow."

The pianist's fingers were dancing on tiptoe! "And now I shall transplant each bud to my favorite flower bed where they can stretch their stems and grow." The young teacher gently enfolded each little child to carry to the "growing plot." Belief and concentration, trust and loving care had suddenly entered that room. From there the teacher could lead her class into the study of all the miracles of the beginning of life.

How gratifying are remarks by Neil Postman, co-author of *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* and one of America's outstanding educators. He said,

> What we have to do is to make the study of one's own feelings a legitimate school activity, invested with an importance at least equal to that presently given to map-reading skills or spelling. This can be done in a variety of ways . . . from regularly scheduled rap sessions, to seminars in value clarification or role playing or adolescent psychology to, best of all, the acceptance of the fact that no sensible distinction can be made between cognitive and affective learning, from which it follows that in every course, in every activity, a serious interest MUST be taken in the feeling of the students.

May the power of this dream emerge as a new catalytic light within the confusion of present curriculum, acting like the luminous bird within this student's poem:

A swallow dips and glides
Passes through the shadows,
And bursts forth with the sun,
A gold patch of light on its breast.

Anywhere human feelings and relationships need to be studied, curriculum dramatics techniques are a potentially effective method of teaching.

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